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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an overview of the Philadelphia Parkway Project. The two distinguishing features of the school are (1) the absence of the usual physical school building, and (2) the full utilization of the community as a learning laboratory. Students' learning experiences derive from classes offered by participating cultural, commercial, governmental, and educational institutions: e.g., a biology class is taught by one of the curators in the Museum of Natural Science, or an art class is held in the Philadelphia Art Museum. Required mathematics and language arts courses are taught by Parkway faculty within tutorial troups, and students participate in seminars where they can translate their learning experiences into meaningful concepts. (Author/MF)

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SCHOOL WITHOUT WALLS

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Lets' talk about the most significant innovation in education today! What we're going to talk about is not the panacea for educational ills and problems but perhaps the most significant innovation that is being carried on today. At least that is what the Parkway Project has been termed by prestigious publications such as Saturday Review, and Life Magazine. The Philadelphia Parkway Project, or as it has been popularly termed the "school without walls", has indeed captured the imagination of educators throughout the nation. Many educators have termed this project the most exciting educational practice to come down the educational pike. Of course, the School District of Philadelphia is proud of the work that is being done in the Parkway Project. I should however, mention that this is only one of many significant projects and innovations that is being carried on in the School District of Philadelphia. The face of urban education is changing in the City of Philadelphia, and I like to think it is changing because people in the School District are willing and able to implement some changes in our traditional concepts of education. The School District is trying to change programs and institute new programs that will serve its clientele. Some of the more innovative programs in the City of Philadelphia, in addition to the Parkway Program, are the Intensive Learning Centers, (which are comparable to Intensive Care Centers in the medical field), the implementation of magnet school programs throughout the city in such diverse disciplines as communications and social organizations, massive

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building programs that should total over $300,000,000 in the next six years, the introduction of the middle school to the organizational plan of the School District, the development of educational clusters in a modified decentralized school district, and the planning of a multitude of school building patterns from educational complexes similar to educational parks, to mini-schools. The term Parkway Project or Parkway School is so used because the school began on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway. The Franklin Parkway is a mile long boulevard stretching between City Hall at one end and the Philadelphia Art Museum at the other end. Along the Parkway there are a score or more of cultural, commercial, governmental, and educational institutions linked by the commonness of the boulevard. The original idea was to fully utilize these institutions in the educational process of high school students; in fact, students were to study and attend classes in the institutions themselves in order to extend their life space and their opportunities for varied experiences. This was the idea behind the development of the Parkway School-- to utilize the community in a very real and meaningful manner.

Implementation of the Concept

For decades, educators have been exorted to use the community as a learning laboratory. History is full of primitive attempts at using the community in this manner such as field trips, work experience, and cooperative studies. The School District of Philadelphia has for many years exploited all of these community-learning experiences in its educational program. But more importantly, the School District now has a group of students that are truly using the immediate environment as a learning laboratory. The concept of utilizing the community as a learning laboratory was physically implemented in February, 1969, for approximately

140 students located in a converted office building at 18th and Market Streets in the heart of the business district. There was no properly designated "school building" for these students. Instead, they used the 18th and Market Street facility as a home base and considered the whole community as their school. The only physical evidence that this facility might house students for any type of activity were the gaily decorated lockers; the rest of the area looked like office space. Not only is the Parkway School unique in that it does not have a school building of its own, but it is also unique in the fact that the institutions and organizations along and near the Parkway constitute a learning laboratory of unlimited resources. These are two basic concepts of the Parkway School - No physical school building which would have a limiting influence upon student's development and full utilization of the community as a learning laboratory. Then the way is open for a complete re-examination and reformulation of what education means for the present day urban student. There is little doubt that such re-construction has far reaching consequences for both the theory and practice of education, since it indicates change in every aspect of the student activity. The space (physical facilities) and time (school schedule) boundaries of the education process have been subjected to a through examination through the parkway project and have been radically altered. Within these new limits, the social structure of the learning community has grown and the description and allocation of roles has been revised to conform to the program's purpose as a learning community. In addition, the nature and function of subject matter has been redefined and brought into a relationship to life so that the total learning community, the Parkway Program itself, has assumed a

different role in status within the greater community in Philadelphia.

Operation of the School

The Parkway School is organized into a series of communities, each numbering about 130-140 students. These communities have been termed, for lack of better terminology, Alpha, Beta, Gamma. The Alpha community was the first community that opened up headquarters at 18th and Market Streets. The Beta community is now housed in Cherry House at 23rd and Cherry Streets and the Gamma community is located in the shadow of the Ben Franklin Bridge of the Paxon School. Inside these communities, the student body is organized into several groups. The first group is called the tutorial group. A tutorial group consists of 15 students, one teacher one university intern. The purpose of this group is threefold. First, it is the family group of the students; the support group for counseling to take place. Secondly, the basic skills of language and mathematics are taught in the tutorial group. Thirdly, the tutorial group is the unit in which the program and the student's performance are evaluated. The next group the student is associated with is the seminar group. This consists of two tutorial groups, or 30 students, 2 teachers and 2 university interns. The function of the seminar group is to work from the students experiences in various Parkway institutions towards a generalized and liberalized view of that experience. It also enables the student to have experiences with members of a different tutorial group as well as different faculty members. The third group within a school community is the management group. This consists of other students and faculty members and university interns who assume responsibility for the functioning of one aspect of the

program. The management group is to perform the functions of and provide the services necessary for Parkway's successful operation, to involve students in a meaningful way in determining the nature of the program, and to help students develop the skills of management which are the source of power in the community. Management groups have formed around the following problem areas: self government, public relations, extra-curricular acitivities, the printing of a Parkway newspaper, and, in conjunction with professors from Temple University, attempting a scientific analysis of the affects of the Parkway Program on the students. This, then, is the organization of the Parkway Schools. Each of the three communities are organized along this same manner.

Parkway Curriculum

The academic curriculum consists of three parts: institutional offerings, basic skills offerings, and electives. The Institutional offerings program consists of those classes offered by participating Parkway institutions. These classes are located in the facilities of the participating institutions, and taught by institutional staff members. Examples of these offerings would be a biology class taught by one of the curators in the Museum of Natural Science, an art class in the Philadelphia Art Museum, a chemistry lesson in the Franklin Institute, or a social studies lesson in government conducted by a municipal official in the Court Building. The Institutional Offerings part of the academic curriculum is developed by staff members. Each teacher is personally responsible for contacting an institution or organization soliciting any possible course offerings and to arrange for a time and a place at the institution for the class to meet. In this way, the Park-

way School has been able to offer its students a choice of over 100 courses; an accomplishment that few high schools in the United States can match. Through this process, teachers are constantly in communication with the community and its organizations and institutions. The second general area of the academic curriculum consists of the basic skills offerings. The basic skills are the required mathematics and language art courses taught by Parkway faculty. These offerings provide students with both remedial and advanced work depending upon the developmental stage of the student. This basic skills offerings also meet the requirements of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The Commonwealth requirements for the high school consists of eight units, three of which are English, one math, one science, two social studies, and one physical education.

The third area of the curriculum consists of the elective offerings. These are the classes in the humanities, physical sciences and social sciences taught mostly by the Parkway faculty. Some elective classes, however, are taught cooperatively by Parkway faculty and institutional employees. These classes also serve to meet the mandated requirements of the Commonwealth. In addition to the academic curriculum, each student is encouraged to participate in a program of individual study in an area of his own interest. This may be done in collaboration with one or more other students. Parkway students are further encouraged to participate in work programs of the Parkway institutions as an extra non-required component. This participation can lead to vacation jobs or to career possibilities. Additionally, there will be the opportunity of community service in a variety of social agencies. If learning is not confined within the spatial limits of school buildings and classrooms, then it is not confined within

conventional time limits either. The concept of class period, school day, school week and school year needs serious modification and possible abandonment. The Parkway Program has abondoned them for the most part, and it provides a year-round, full-time learning opportunity for anyone in the program. The schedule of each student is determined by his learning opportunity for anyone in the program. The schedule of each student is determined by his learning requirements and not by the clock hours of administration and organizational convenience.

Students are selected by lottery to attend this school. This means the school must accommodate a wide-range of abilities within the student body, but it also means better racial and ethnic mix for the student body. Students apply for admission to this school, and their acceptance is through a lottery system. Each of the eight school districts with the City of Philadelphia are alloted a certain number of student vacancies according to its student population. Further, a limited number of students from the suburbs and the parochial schools are admitted to the Parkway Program. These students are admitted on a reciprocal basis so the students from the public schools may take the place of those students from the suburbs and parochial schools going to the Parkway Program. Such a plan seeks to foster racial integration between the city schools and the suburban and parochial school systems. Selection of teachers was, likewise, on an application basis. The question, undoubtedly, comes to mind regarding the certification of the persons teaching the Institutional Offering courses. Naturally, the people who teach these courses are not certified as teachers by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. But the offering in the various institutions are not classes mandated by the Commonwealth either. The basic skills which are mandated

by the Department of Public Instruction are taught by regularly certified teachers. The courses offered by the institutions are not required for either state reimbursement or for accreditation purposes.

Expansion of a concept

There have been many favorable spin-offs of the bold idea of the Parkway School. This past winter through the combined efforts of the West Philadelphia black community, the School District, the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia Civic Center and area churches and businesses, the West Philadelphia Community Free School was established. Patterned after the Free School of Denmark, this Community Free School will have approximately 300 students in a section and will be housed in facilities outside of the high school with half of the program offered at the high school. The rest of the time, these students will use the University of Pennsylvania and Drexel Institute facilities and personnel of the public and private agencies of West Philadelphia, to carry on the educational program. As in the Parkway Project, School District teachers will teach the subjects required by the state. This school will be patterned after the Parkway Program, even though the genesis of the program came from the immediate community. It is anticipated that several other "educational communities" as these schools are called, will be formulated this year so that over 1,000 students will be involved in this type of educational experience by June, 1970. Over 700 of these students will be in various Parkway communities, and the rest in free schools.

Results and Evaluation

The Parkway School has been in operation for almost a year and a half. Consequently, evaluation of this project is minimal.

One evaluative effort, however, was made by Beaver College, Pennasylvania. Members of the Beaver College staff evaluated the attitudinal changes of Parkway students from February to May. As yet, the results of that study have not been published.

The most elementary form of evaluation is what students themselves think of the school and what they report about the school. In all cases, no matter who the correspondent may be, students report that they like the school, and this is the first time they have felt that their school experiences were relevant and that if it were not for the Parkway School they would be a dropout. Although such reports are naturally not amenable to statistical treatment, they do reflect an initial glow of success. But it is possible to conclude that this program was relevant and successful to these students.

Evaluations can also be made about the number of students who dropped out and also the numbers of teachers who transferred from the Parkway to other schools. As of this date, there have been no teachers that requested a transfer from this school. Likewise, neither has there been any student dropouts. Consequently, from this rudimentary evaluative measure, the program was a success. An additional evaluative measure that will be used is the number of students accepted by colleges and other institutions of higher learning.

Future evaluations will include student performance at institutions of higher learning, as well as evaluation of students who went to work following graduation. Longitudinal studies of both cognitive and affeective areas will be completed with the students who enter the Parkway Program whether they be 9th or 12th grades. This will be part of an on-going evaluation program conducted by the De-

partment of Research and Evaluation. It is impossible today to statistically prove the Parkway is a success. If the intense look of a happy "turned on" student is any criteria, however, the program is a success. If a teacher's exhuberance for her work and students and her belief in the program is any criteria, then the program is a success.

Summary

It has already been stated that by using the institutions along the Parkway, students extend their life space and increase their capacity for experience. This is a very real function, but it is one which any area could perform. The unique and specific importance of the Parkway institutions lies in the unparalleled wealth of material and human resources which they bring to the very small area of the city. Within a few short blocks there can be found some of the best museums and collections in the world. The research work that is conducted along the Parkway is of civic, national and even international importance. Students have easy and continuous access to the fine collections of paintings, sculptures, scientific instruments and books available along the Parkway which would enhance any educational program. Beyond this, however, business, industrial, and community organizations again of national and international reputation, have expressed interest in providing opportunities for students to study extensively with them and to pursue work study programs.

There are two further advantages for Parkway Program students. First, in addition to the material resources of these institutions, there is the possiblility of intense and varied contact for the student with highly skilled professional personnel who contributeto their continuing life. To have such people as adjunct faculty members, is to provide specialist teachers of

the highest possible caliber. Second, as an optional and additional activity, there is the possibility of participating in the work of these institutions, and, particularly in their research work. This is an opportunity for sharing exciting, creative and original work denied even to most college students. Finally, it must be remembered that the Benjamin Franklin Parkway begins at City Hall and that for many years the organization of Philadelphia's city government has been a model for the nation. Students in the Parkway Program will be able to study, at first-hand, the administration of a city which is a rocognized leader in urban renewal. It is not necessary to point out that the modern city government of Philadelphia is the outcome of a tradition as old as the nation itself, with a wealth of historical resources available almost on every corner, even to the most casual student.